

## FROM THE EDITOR

Only a few days back, on December 16, we have celebrated our Forty years of independence, rather Forty years our victory against the occupying Pakistani forces. We dreamt of an independent state in which democracy would flourish, fundamental human rights and freedom would be guaranteed, all the indicators of our economic developments would be favorable, we shall achieve self-sufficiency in food, achievement of the industries sector would meet our expectation, expansion of educational facilities would be expanded, improvement in health sector would be remarkable and so on. Mr Abdul Latif Mondal, a former Secretary of the Government of Bangladesh, has quite prudently highlighted our achievements and failures in this context. He writes: We celebrate today, December 16, the 40th anniversary of our victory against the occupying Pakistani forces. The surrender of the Pakistani forces to the Indo-Bangladeshi High Command at Dhaka Race Course (now Suhrawardy Uddyan) on this day in 1971 made our declaration of independence on March 26 of the same year a reality.

The people dreamt of an independent state in which democracy would flourish uninterruptedly and their effective participation through elected representatives at all levels in administration would be ensured. The people dreamt of a state in which fundamental human rights and freedoms and respect for the dignity and worth of the human person would be guaranteed. The people dreamt of a state that would take effective steps with a view to securing for its citizens the provision of basic necessities of life. Above all, the people dreamt of a modern and progressive Bangladesh.

Now the question may arise as to whether their dreams have come true or not.

Although the Constitution of Bangladesh adopted on November 4, 1972 provided for a multi-party parliamentary democracy, introduction of one-

party presidential system of government and capture of state power by ambitious army generals leading to dictatorial rule impeded the development of democracy. The united movement of the people brought an end to such rule, which helped restore multi-party parliamentary democracy in 1991. But, democracy is yet to take root in the country.

East Pakistan, now Bangladesh, was a victim of economic disparity. All the indicators of economic development were highly unfavourable. The US diplomat Henry Kissinger called Bangladesh "a bottomless basket." Kissinger has been proved wrong. Bangladesh may not have achieved the desired economic goals, but its successes in the past forty years are by no means insignificant.

In the last seven years, Bangladesh achieved GDP growth rate more or less at 6%. Against per capita national income of 100 dollar or so immediately before independence, per capita national income and GDP in FY 2010-11 stood at 818 dollar and 755 dollar respectively. (Source: Bangladesh Economic Survey, 2011). All indications suggest that Bangladesh will graduate into a middle income country by 2021.

Although Bangladesh has not been able to achieve self-sufficiency in all foods, it has achieved near self-sufficiency in rice, the staple food. While total production of food grain (rice and wheat) for 75 million people of the country was around 10 million tons in 1970-71, food grain production stood at about 35 million tons in 2010-11 for 150 million people or so. This means in the past forty years food grain growth rate has surpassed the population growth rate.

Fish is the main source of protein for our people. Total production of fish (open water, closed water and marine fisheries) in 2010-11 stood at 3.1 million tons against our demand for 3.3 million tons. This means that our fish production meets about 94% of our requirement. Our frozen shrimp

and fish products are exported to the US, the EU countries, Japan, Saudi Arabia, Hong Kong and some other countries.

Although the achievement of the industries sector in the past forty years has failed to meet expectations, the performance of the ready-made garment (RMG) industry has been astounding. The RMG sector is not only the highest foreign exchange earner in the export sector, it also employs about 5 million labourers of which around 4 million are poor women.

In the past forty years, there has been rapid expansion of educational facilities both in the government and the private sectors, resulting in the increase of literacy rate to about 60% from 18% on liberation. More importantly, there has been a tremendous improvement in the enrolment of girls at the primary and secondary levels, which has exceeded that of male students, due to various incentives provided by the government.

There has been tremendous improvement in some areas of health sector. Average life span for men and women has increased from below 50 years in 1970 to 65 plus years. While child mortality rate (per 1,000 live births) was 146 in 1970-71, it has now come down to 53. This falls short by 3 only to achieve the MDG target of 50 by 2015. Maternal mortality rate (per 100,000 deliveries) has come down to 348 from 574 in 1990-91. The rate of population growth now stands at 1.36% compared to 2.67% on liberation.

Our achievements in the fields of international sports are not insignificant. Our boys are well established in all forms of international cricket. Bangladesh women's cricket team has recently achieved ODI and T20 status. Bangladesh co-hosted the ICC Cricket World Cup 2011 along with India and Sri Lanka.

Observance of February 21st as Language Martyrs' Day in memory of those who laid down their lives in February, 1952 for the cause of Bangla language is no longer limited to Bangladesh. The UN has declared February 21st as International Mother Language Day. We confidently hope that Bangla will be one of the languages of the UN in the near future.

We have many other achievements that cannot be mentioned here due to shortage of space.

We have failures also. The march of our democracy has been halted several times. The people are concerned about the fate of their hard earned democracy due to confrontational politics of the two major political parties, AL and BNP, and lack of minimum understanding between them on major national issues.

In the past forty years, fundamental rights guaranteed by the Constitution have been violated again and again. Arbitrary arrests, detention and custodial deaths have become routine matters. Freedom of media is under constant threat.

We have so far failed to establish good governance which has, amongst others, hampered the growth of FDI and business.

According to government sources, 31.5% people now live below the poverty line. This means that out of 150 million people of the country, 45 plus million are living below poverty line. They cannot afford two square meals a day due to lack of purchasing power.

Fulfilment of people's dreams and expectations will make our Victory Day celebration meaningful. We shall have to keep national interest above petty individual and party interest and work hard towards achieving the desired goals.